

From Dictionary.com:

Wake¹

weyk

verb (used without object), waked or woke, waked or wok•en, wak•ing .

1. to become roused from sleep; awake, awaken, waken (often followed by up).
2. to become roused from a tranquil or inactive state; awaken: waken: to wake from one's daydreams.
3. to become cognizant or aware of something; awaken; waken: to wake to the true situation.
4. to be or continue to be awake: Whether I wake or sleep, I think of you.
5. to remain awake for some purpose, duty, etc.: I will wake until you return.

verb (used with object), waked or woke, waked or wok•en, wak•ing.

8. to rouse from sleep; awake; awaken; waken (often followed by up):

Don't wake me for breakfast. Wake me up at six o'clock.

9. to rouse from lethargy, apathy, ignorance, etc . often followed by up) : *The tragedy woke us up to the need for safety precautions.*

10. to hold a wake for or over (a dead person).

11. to keep watch or vigil over.

noun

12. a watching, or a watch kept, especially for some solemn or ceremonial purpose.

13. a watch or vigil by the body of a dead person before burial, sometimes accompanied by feasting or merrymaking.

14. a local annual festival in England, formerly held in honor of the patron saint or on the anniversary of the dedication of a church but now usually having little or no religious significance.

15. the state of being awake : between sleep and wake.

noun

1. the track of waves left by a ship or other object moving through the water : The wake of the boat

glowed in the darkness.

2. the path or course of an-t thing that has passed or preceded: The tornado :left ruin in its wake.

IdiotrJ S

3. in the wake of,

- a. as a result of : An investigation followed in the wake of the scandal.

- b. succeeding; following: in the wake of the pioneer s.

¹ Dictionary.com

Author's Foreword

My parents were both nuts. I could impress you by saying my dad once held my mother and I at gunpoint, but the truth is I wasn't afraid. I guess I figured he wasn't really going to shoot us, even though he shot a round through the floor just to let us know his gun was loaded. My mother, on the other hand, believed him. I could tell from her flatulent and prayerful manner.

I think the most damage done to me by my parents was never being touched by them, especially my mother, as a child. I don't mean she didn't hold me in her lap. I don't mean she failed to put her arm around me. I mean she didn't touch me--ever. My sister says if it weren't for her, I would never have been touched by anyone.

My dad was one of the kindest, gentlest people you would ever want to meet and everyone loved him, even though I thought of him as a chump, except when he was manic. Then, he knew everything and couldn't wait to share it. He often called the White House. He even called the Pope. My mom and I had a good laugh over that. Here was this madman, who had bullied his way through three sets of operators, and now he couldn't speak Italian. Manic was the only time he stood up to my mother.

She was present when I was a child, but she wasn't there, except to tell me what to fear. I opened my Thesaurus yesterday and there was a list of about three hundred paranoia's. I could check off about sixty and re-file the page under "Mom."

If I really needed something, like the car when I had an important date, or shoes that fit before I was old enough to work I could count on her to say, "No." I remember when I was about ten, I had accumulated twenty-four dollars from collecting and recycling soda pop bottles.

My mom said, "Can I borrow your money?"

"Sure," I said, confident she must be ever so proud of me.

When I asked for the money back, she not only didn't repay me, but vehemently denied she had ever borrowed it.

You may say, "We've all had screwed up parents," but did you ever sit in the corner of a room and wonder which was the ceiling and which was the floor? That's the child's perspective when you have no one to verify reality.

As a child, when I asked adults whether or not my mother was crazy, they would say, "You need to be a little more *patient* with her."

As a young man, if you'd asked me to learn Yiddish and translate an encyclopedia, I could have done it. But, if you'd asked me what someone else was thinking, or why they were motivated to do something, I would have had a difficult time answering.

How could I ever expect to become a writer? What do you do if you don't experience, or even observe, the normal range of human feelings? Do you make like Beethoven, get down on your knees, put your ear to the floorboard and feel the vibrations in the wood? Or can you memorize them? I protected myself as a child by fashioning a bubble around myself and not letting anyone in, except my sister. The alternative, as I saw it, was madness.

This is my story--fictionalized to protect the innocent, the guilty and the mad.

Part I

The Crash

Chapter One

Confession

St. Patrick's Cathedral

New York City

Thursday; March 23, 1995

11:45 p.m.

As Monsignor Vincent O'Reilly approached the penitents, he cast his eyes downward toward the base of the pews. He avoided eye contact so that those with shameful reflections would not shrink from the quest for grace, forgiveness and Light. He also feared for his safety.

Whether or not there should be a late Saturday night Mass, preceded by Confessions, was hotly debated in the rectory of Saint Patrick's Cathedral. While those who opposed the services weren't at liberty to discuss the specific reasons for their reluctance due to the sacred seal of the confessional, it was generally understood that some of the most unsavory and volatile of God's creatures confessed their indiscretions just before midnight Mass.

Mayhem was not an uncommon subject for discussion between priest and penitent. Once Monsignor O'Reilly heard a Confession from a man who had killed his wife, then cut her body into tiny cubes and fed them to the piranha at the zoo where he worked--a few cubes at a time--taken in his lunch box. Vince imagined how the pieces

must have smelled; even though the penitent said they had been refrigerated and ended the session prematurely by barfing all over his cassock.

Reports of incest, robbery, beatings, and other forms of debauchery were commonplace. It was a relief to only hear “I stole three packs of cigarettes and took the Lord’s name in vain seven times.”

There had been the confession of a woman’s adultery, so graphic and sensual the Monsignor retreated to his room and pleased himself so many times over the course of the next few days that he suffered utter and complete physical exhaustion. He’d hardly been able to attend to his clerical duties, prepare his sermon, or stay awake during vespers.

There was to be a High Mass this evening and the preparatory smells of burning incense filled the creases and crevasses of the church from the altar to the choir loft. The scent was so strong that the celebrant directed that several of the windows in the back of the church be opened. This exposed the congregation to a cold, piercing wind.

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” began the gravelly voice of a man the Monsignor at first thought he might have recognized, before he lost his train of thought in the din of screeching traffic beneath the open windows. “It has been twenty years since my last confession.”

“Yes, my son,” the monsignor said in a conciliatory tone. He tried to create a supportive environment, conducive to repentance. But tonight he slumped in his high backed wooden chair, rested his black zucchetto with magenta piping on his lap, and flopped his chubby elbows over the armrests. He was physically and emotionally drained from the demands of his administrative duties, which included deflecting pedophilia charges leveled at the archdiocese.

There was no response. The man knelt in silence.

“Yes, my son,” the priest repeated.

Still there was no response. The Monsignor waited, wondering what to do. He began to pray for the man’s soul.

“I’m a murderer,” the penitent said.

The priest sat up, hoping he had misunderstood the man’s shrive. “What?”

“You heard me, Padre. I’ve committed lots of murders. I’d give you an exact count, but I can’t.”

Struggling to come to attention, Vince sat erect in his chair, disoriented—as though he had just been soaked with cold water, awakened from a sound sleep.

The man continued. “Well, not me exactly. Let’s just say I helped some lost souls expedite their journey to the hereafter. That’s just the same, ain’t it, Padré?”

The priest couldn’t make up his mind whether the man was telling the truth or taunting him. He put his ear closer to the linen cloth that obscured the man’s features. He could see the penitent’s silhouette against the pure white cloth, back-lit by bright beams of light from the choir loft that peeked through the draperies on the windows of the confessional door. He couldn’t distinguish the man’s features, but he could tell that he had facial hair. “Are you telling the truth?”

“I wouldn’t shit you within these holy walls, Padré,” he said. “. . . even if your kind desecrates them. *Capiche?*”

Incense bit at the priest’s nose. Blood drained from his fingertips, leaving them icy and fidgety.

Do I know this man? Ill at ease, the priest shifted his weight from one cheek to the other on his hard wooden chair.

“In order to receive absolution, you must be remorseful, my son,” Monsignor O’Reilly said in a tone intended to assuage the penitent’s malevolence and draw him toward the Light.

There was a long silence. The man’s coarse voice dripped with rancor. “She had it coming,” the confessant said. “She cleaved unto others!”

“Do you mean she was an adulteress?”

“She wahz,” the man replied, driving home the reality that they were speaking of her in the past tense.

Monsignor O’Reilly did his best to ignore the man’s impertinence. He tried to keep his mind on saving his soul. “Even if she did, that doesn’t justify murder,” he said.

The man spoke in a condescending voice,

“Deuteronomy 22, verse 22: If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband then they shall both of them die, *both* the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.”

The monsignor felt a chill race up his spine.

“That’s from the Old Testament, my son. The New Testament teaches us to be merciful and forgiving.”

The priest could sense the man’s agitation as his bench creaked, while the penitent rocked back and forth behind the thin, translucent piece of linen which hung between them. The penitent crowed, “New Testament? They didn’t abide the New Testament! If they had, I wouldn’t have done ‘em in.” Invidious laughter enveloped his words.

The voice again seemed familiar. “Who are you? Do I know you?” The monsignor asked.

There was no answer.

“Do I know you?” the priest insisted.

Still there was no response. The priest had an irrepressible feeling the man was gone.

Then, he did the unthinkable. He opened the door to the confessional, leapt into the aisle, and caught a glimpse of someone hurriedly slipping through the swinging doors of the vestibule. All he saw was the dark colored tail of a full-length coat as it barely slipped between the doors before they swung shut.

Chapter Two

JFK International Airport

New York City

March 23, 1995

10:35 p.m.

Theresa Fleherty, a petite woman with light-brown, frosted hair and a tight fitting pant suit, settled into her seat on the Boeing Seven-Forty-Seven. A tall blonde, whom she had seen in the terminal with a man in a large black cowboy hat, appeared next to her in the aisle. "Excuse me. They've got me sitting in the last row. The man I was traveling with was detained and decided to catch another flight. I notice there's no one sitting next to you." She pointed to the empty aisle seat next to Theresa. "Do you mind if I sit there?"

A young girl sat on the other side of Theresa, next to the window. She had on a headset and was busy reading a Nancy Drew mystery.

Theresa felt uncomfortable thinking of someone sitting next to her whom she didn't know, but figured the seat would end up being filled anyway. Then, she wouldn't have the opportunity to choose her companion. "No, of course not," Theresa said. "It'll be nice to have you to talk to. Someone was supposed to be sitting there, but it didn't work out for us either."

The woman placed her carry-on luggage, including a black cowboy hat, into the overhead bin.

"I know just how you feel," the blonde said. "I tried to talk my boyfriend, Smiley, into coming along tonight, but he insisted he had to stay with his band to finish a recording. That's why we were in New York."

"Really, then why are *you* leaving? New York is a great spot. There's plenty of nightlife and you can shop till you drop." Theresa had proven the latter point many times over and the tone of her voice reflected a high degree of satisfaction from the effort.

"I know what you mean. But I'm working, too. In my business, you've only got but so long to make it and then—"

"My goodness. What kind of business are you in?"

"I'm a fashion model," the gaunt, small breasted woman said.

Theresa felt her skin crawl with envy. She had always thought she could have been a fashion model if only she had been a couple of inches taller and hadn't traded her honor for an unwanted pregnancy, consummated in the backseat of Michael Fleherly's Ford Fairlane convertible one sweltering summer night at the drive in.

"My heavens," Theresa said. "That must be exciting."

"It has its pluses and minuses," she said. "I'd really like to get married and settle down, but Smiley has to travel a lot with his band at least until they get established. Then he says we'll still have plenty of time for marriage, children, things like that. But I'm ready now. I'm tired of living on skimmed milk and veggies."

Theresa thought about how different her life was than this starry-eyed young woman's. How foolishly she had traded her youth and potential for lust and motherhood. The stewardess came by to hand them damp washcloths. The air-conditioning had been running incessantly, but it didn't seem to be doing anything more than recycling the stifling hot air. Theresa was ready for the plane to take off after all she had gone through to make the flight.

She slipped her fingertips just below her neckline and touched the necklace she had purchased that afternoon. After everything she had risked in attaining it, she was terrified something would happen to it, like the clasp might break and fall to the ground without her knowing it during her travels.

The necklace hung just below the collar of the snug, gray body shirt she had bought to accent her black pantsuit. In spite of her concerns, she had an urge to wear the necklace where everyone could see it and revel in the glow of the attention it would

bring. Heads would turn. Admirers would envy her good fortune. Its profound beauty, value and quality would be obvious to even the most casual observer. Her worth and stature would be established.

But just as she began to lift the jewels from below her collar, fear paralyzed her and she kept it hidden. Instead she patted it to make sure it was secure.

The captain announced, "Thank you for your patience, ladies and gentlemen. We apologize for the delay. We'll be airborne momentarily.

"For those of you who'd like to listen in, you'll find air traffic control on channel eight."

Theresa picked up the complimentary headset and tuned in to the air traffic channel. She thought maybe listening to the confident tone of the pilot and air traffic controllers would give her a sense of security. Her palms were sweaty. She wasn't sure if that was from the heat or her anxiety.

The young girl in the inside seat gazed out the window and the blonde next to her on the aisle thumbed through a magazine. The incessant licking by the model of her fingers, followed by the crinkling sound of the turning pages annoyed her.

Theresa listened intently to the channel, trying to calm herself. "El Al Flight eight-five-five, you are next to control the runway. Taxi into position and hold."

"Negative. Low oil pressure on number three engine. El Al eight-five-five canceling clearance."

"Roger, eight-five-five. Worldwide Airways eight-zero-zero heavy, take runway two-seven and hold."

Their plane taxied onto the runway.

"Whiskey-whiskey-alpha eight-zero-zero cleared for take-off."

The pilot and air traffic controller sounded so professional. She told herself that in spite of the terrible weather and horrid ride to the airport, not to mention cross words with her husband and her betrayal, nothing bad would happen.

"Roger, eight-zero-zero heavy's rolling." Her plane and her plan were now in motion.

The girl in the window seat sat up. She took off her headset and turned off her reading light. She fluffed her pillow, propped her head between her seatback and window, leaned onto the pillow and closed her eyes.

The plane came to life, like a tired beast, struggling to overcome inertia. At first it hobbled down the runway, then picked up its pace and stirred into a gallop. As the captain pulled back on the stick and the tip of the nose rose above the horizon, Theresa felt the power of thousands of pure white Arabian horses bolting into the choppy night sky.

As soon as they became airborne, the plane bounced and shimmied.

She reached over and gripped the blonde's forearm.

"Frightened?" the woman said. She offered an understanding facial expression in spite of the biting of Theresa's nails into her arm.

"Yes," Theresa replied. She had a terrible rush in her veins, as if every evil deed she had ever perpetrated coursed through them. Her breathing became shallow and coarse.

I shouldn't have nailed Michael quite so hard. Theresa pictured the angry expression he would have on his face when he opened next month's bank statement, at first believing it must be a mistake.

Suddenly, the plane dropped, as if on a roller coaster. She shrieked, as did several other passengers. They were weightless. In less than a second, the seven-forty-seven found traction and shook.

A chime signaled the flight attendants. They were over a minute into the flight and passing through ten thousand feet on their way to thirty-two thousand feet, according to the captain. "We expect to rise above the storm clouds shortly." This time Theresa's nails dug into the arm rest. It's a good thing, because she squeezed so hard they would have drawn blood.

"Please keep your seat belts securely fastened," the captain continued, first in French and then repeated by a flight attendant in English. The anguished expressions on the stewardess' and stewards' faces intensified.

The young girl woke up, looked out the window and yelled, "Hey, it's a—"

A small explosion rocked the plane, followed by a blinding flash of silver-white light. Smoke filled the cabin. Alarms sounded. Lights flickered. The dim glow of emergency lights appeared in clear plastic piping along the aisles. Masks dropped. Passengers struggled—mothers before their children—to put them on in the hazy, acrid air.

Theresa screamed, “Jesus, Mary, Joseph! Please, God! Forgive me!”

She rummaged through her purse, searching for the rosary she no longer carried. A second, massive explosion shattered the plane and blasted its pieces into the dark purple abyss of an unforgiving night sky.

* * *

The noise was deafening to those who heard the explosion from the ground. Shock waves ran in every direction. The plane burst into one enormous fireball, then another. The flames were spectacular. Geysers of bright orange with shades of yellow, green, red and blue lit up the horizon. The plane struggled to escape, hurtling further and further through the sky until it lost momentum—crested, like a breached whale, broke into three huge pieces, arched downward--then plunged helplessly toward the dark-green waters of the raging night sea.

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N.B.: This novel is scheduled for completion in the Fall of 2014. To receive a notification, send an email to books@danococonnor.com with “Wake pub” in the subject line.